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ABSTRACT

Liberals have been largely successful in accomplishing their goal of equalizing educational opportunity through the use of federal powers, but it is now quite clear that this achievement has in no way brought about the expected increase in domestic tranquility. Indeed, the relationship between them seems to be the reverse of those great expectations. Education, by being linked to the economy, while lacking commensurate power to shape industrial activities, is not capable of fulfilling its goals for changing the society. Moreover, by focusing on the external needs of the social order, it has ignored at great cost its own province of the mind. (Author)

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PAPER: The Brief Interlude: Federal Intervention in American Education, 1944-1974

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The Brief Interlude:
Federal Intervention in American Education, 1944-1974

The past decade has not been an easy time for Americans. The continuous drain on our material and human resources in support of an unpopular war in Southeast Asia, coupled with a sequence of economic dislocations at home, has conspired to produce severe social tensions that have sorely tested the optimism customarily associated with our national character. In this context, the Watergate scandals can be seen as only the latest in a series of political crises during a ten-year period marked by assassination and general suspicion about the legitimacy of our institutional leadership. Similarly, the widely-proclaimed energy shortage is only the most visible reminder of the limits of industrial growth and of the insufficiency of purely technological solutions for complex social problems. Hopefully, the awareness of our inability to defeat an underdeveloped communist society despite an overwhelming military superiority may yet react with an increased understanding of the intractability of many issues which confront us to assist in the creation of a more mature political culture in America.[1] But whether or not Americans have been able to absorb a sense of historical tragedy from present circumstances, the dashing of our most cherished aspirations for the future already has contributed to a more

sophisticated analysis of the past.[2]

As the contradictions and stresses of the American economy emerged more clearly in the post-World-War-II era, manifested most obviously in the declining competitive position of the United States vis-à-vis other capitalist powers whose industrial machines had been rebuilt in large measure by the Marshall Plan, revisionist historians focused upon those aspects of our national past which previous scholars had enshrined as evidence of American genius. Thus, infatuation with the obvious advantages of pragmatism was replaced by an intense ideological scrutiny which examined questions of social mobility and rediscovered class conflict, which inquired into the reformist ethos of the progressive political tradition only to uncover the imperatives of monopoly capitalism, and which investigated the supposed beneficence of an open door foreign policy to find little difference between ourselves and other imperialist powers.[3] In many ways, however, the best of the revisionist scholarship has focused on the peculiar role of American education in the development of a democratic capitalist society.[4]

Few of us would want to argue that these newer studies are entirely convincing while earlier ones were merely apologies designed to mask the realities of power and its exercise. It is more likely that further efforts to integrate the findings of both schools will be necessary if we are to come to grips with the American past. Still, it would be just as difficult to deny that a dialectical movement from

traditionalist to revisionist to some new synthesis (an analysis which has already started to appear, at least in part) has significantly enriched both our profession and the public thought about the meaning of history and its implications for the future.[5] Our historical imagination, for example, has certainly been stimulated by the illuminating perspective of younger insurgent academicians who, while accepting the established view that the educational process was most revealing of the nature of American society, simultaneously challenged fundamental aspects of the prevailing social order. From this vantage point, a critique was generated which tended to dismiss the humanitarian, idealistic and egalitarian image of the school system that had characterized much of the literature in educational history, and instead offered evidence that the institutionalization of learning was primarily responsive to the demands of a ruling elite for greater social control.[6] Seen in this context, the much-touted virtues of competition, excellence and individualism took on the attributes of devices whose real purpose was to prevent the development of integrative personalities, and thus to shape people into docile creatures who could be more easily absorbed by a hierarchical, but inherently unstable, social structure. While helping us to understand the social dimensions of an educational process which is as much a public affair as it is a matter of private experience, such perceptions also provided an explanation for the paradoxical situation in which citizens of the freest

society in the world (or at least, of the one which claimed leadership of the "Free World") were increasingly given to the expression of feelings of being "trapped in a system."[7]

More precisely, radical scholars were most successful in making explicit the connections between our educational system and the dynamics of an expansionist capitalist economy. Liberal colleagues, it is true, frequently had recourse to marketplace imagery in their descriptions of the system and in the elaboration of its functions, but suspicion of laissez-faire rhetoric had caused professional dissidents to question more closely the actual operation of pedagogical arrangements geared to the needs of a productive order based on economic growth and technological advancement. In marked contrast to those who defended the social utility of private enterprise, opponents of the free market (in ideas as well as in more durable commodities) exposed the ecological fallout from the schooling business, now especially valuable since it had become America's largest industry.[8] Personal pleasure and social rewards, they argued, had been sacrificed in an educational system designed not to facilitate learning and independent, critical thought, but rather to meet the exigencies of an advanced industrial economy. In contradistinction to the liberal assumptions about the identity of personal satisfaction and social interest, radicals emphasized the separation between individual and institutional requirements, and the dominance of productive needs. In education, they contended, this meant that formal institutions

of learning were entrusted with responsibility not only for shaping our attitudes as consumers, but also for delaying young people's entrance into a labor force already suffering high rates of unemployment, for producing skilled workers useful for sophisticated business practices and for manipulating individual behavior so that people could be adjusted to the rhythms and disciplines of an industrial society which needed greater productivity from its functionaries.[9]

However fruitful these analyses have been, their inability to incorporate the insights of the more conventional explorations of American education has rendered them incapable of explaining certain essential features of the system's development. If radicals have opened promising new avenues of historical inquiry by penetrating the liberal tenet that portrayed education as a neutral process through the introduction of considerations of power into discussions about schooling, neither they nor their intellectual and political adversaries have adequately confronted the fact that, while our educational institutions have not been as benign and enlightened as they have been protrayed, still it is nevertheless true that "our schools are not monolithic; people do not emerge from them as sausages out of a meat-packing plant."[10] Admittedly, this is the situation in American society at large as well, for schools generally mirror and embody the contradictions evident in the entire social milieu. Radicals, few of whom were Marxists, were unable to perceive such paradoxes because their thoroughgoing

cynicism remained merely the negation of the naive optimism of the social thought that preceded theirs. Like their ideological opponents, they accepted the image of education as the key mechanism for normative social change, reversing only the judgment that through its actions alone it had been the primary mechanism which had built a better society in the past and could do so in the future. On the contrary, they insisted that education was almost solely responsible for the problems of contemporary American society.[11]

In their examination of the origins and growth of the present educational system, both advocates and critics have failed to adequately consider the possibility that, like the development of bourgeois society itself, education really was a historically-liberating force in an earlier period, just as it has since become more repressive in later stages of capitalist evolution. Moreover, if education has begun to reflect the general disintegration of American culture which followed from the increasing difficulties associated with the private ownership of powerful productive enterprises, the institutionalized learning process shares the ambivalence of contemporary economic relationships that have brought a considerable degree of psychological and material freedom to significant numbers of people even while exacting the heavy prices about which we are beginning to learn.[12] The tendency of American education to manifest the conflicts of a democratic-capitalistic society is evident in its inability to resolve the persistent internal tensions of

a system that is both public and private, secular and religious, democratic and elitist, vocational and cultural, and compulsory on lower levels while voluntary on higher ones. Yet responsibility for the continuing economic, political and social inequality in America cannot be attributed entirely to education for this reason. The educational system mirrors the unequal distribution of resources and rewards common to other areas of Ameircan life, and its organizational structure has followed the tendency of seeking greater efficiency, rationality, centralization and bureaucratization frequently observed in other parts of our society. Still, its historical development also recapitulates the paradoxical aspects of the changes taking place in the larger society, and the peculiarities of this history even accentuate some of these paradoxes.[13]

Werner Jaeger, in his monumental study of Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, has noted that "education is the process by which a community preserves and transmits its physical and intellectual character."[14] If earlier commentators on American culture had idealistically assumed that this meant that our educational system represented a national belief in egalitarianism and pragmatism, more recent observers have reminded us of the epistemological and moral limitations of a bourgeois society constructed around a cash nexus:

> Laissez-faire education runs the same risks as laissez-faire economics. Power and privilege accumulate like an avalanche. There must be safeguards, regulations, guarantees of opportunities, and these themselves perpetuate the system. Compulsory

> education was invented to help equalize opportunity, to even the score, to prevent exploitation. To some extent it has done so, but at the same time it has created deadening standardization, artificiality, and, as Ivan Illich often points out, a new system of hierarchy and privilege as oppressive as the one it was meant to displace. [15]

For all its rhetorical insistence on the paramount importance of individual well-being and personal satisfaction, American education has functioned within a competitive and hierarchical structure that was directed at the creation of a meritocratic elite whose power theoretically rested on demonstrable ability to produce rather than on artificial distinctions of unearned status and wealth.[16]

Nevertheless, elite attempts to make schooling a convenient mechanism for social control and greater labor productivity did not inevitably lead to the consolidation of local and regional educational institutions into a national system dominated by comparatively few prestigious universities. There were, after all, many instances of working class resistence to such impositions and substantial evidence of indigenous support for education that would be responsive to labor's needs.[17] This sustained opposition should be a reminder that, although the concerted efforts to make the educational system insure predictability in technological innovation, stability in social relationships, and docility in political behavior have in many ways paralleled the concentration of national economic power by major industrial corporations, they have been noticeably less successful than had been hoped by those who wanted education to buttress

their power against real and imagined popular discontent. The failure to fully implement their design should not obscure the intent of the upper socio-economic groups which consistently have been the most forceful partisans of educational change; nor should we assume that these schemes were not realized because of the insurmountable obstacle presented by the inherently subversive nature of the learning process--a recognized danger which could not be neutralized even by the establishment of formal institutions to contain it.[18]

The ironic and anomalous nature of this experience serves to illustrate the divergence between the historical development of education and of other areas of social life in America, especially in terms of the role of the state. Notwithstanding the orthodox version of the American past which, in accordance with the political economy of classical liberalism minimized the function of government, we are now well-aware of how critical governmental intervention was in a whole host of activities.[19] Historians, in fact, have begun to sketch a quite different pattern for the development of marketplace operations, a pattern which emphasizes the ways in which the state intervened to protect business interests, justifying its actions when necessary by claiming its defense of the general social welfare. Yet this presumed identity between business and the society itself has been contradicted by recent studies which challenge the image perpetuated by liberal historians, arguing instead that it was powerful corporate interests themselves which sought a

more active stance by the federal government.[20]

This process of mutually-desired inter-penetration between the political and economic spheres of American society has been strongly accentuated during the course of the twentieth century, as the growth of capitalism continually has generated a need for more explicitly managed change.[21] If lately we have grown accustomed to this intimate relationship, there is one area of public life in America in which intervention by the federal government is not at all taken for granted. Washington's self-conscious manipulation of diverse aspects of America's social environment, if not always by means of very sophisticated devices, and if almost never completely reliable, still had been routine for some time before a comparable attempt was made by the federal government to get leverage on the workings of the educational system. For both revisionist and orthodox historians, as well as for those citizens concerned about the implications of the past for current problems and for future possibilities in American education, the significance of the federal government's role cannot be underestimated.

It is sometimes difficult to remember, for instance, that recent attempts by the Nixon administration severely to reduce the federal presence in education would return the national government to this traditional relationship to state and local education agencies.[22] Whether or not the President will be entirely successful in terminating the educational activism that had begun to be associated with Washington-

based reform efforts, his recognition of the bankruptcy of past tactics illustrates a lesson which few educators and social planners have been willing to face forthrightly. The aura of suspicion that prevails in the wake of continued Watergate revelations should not be allowed to obscure some of the constructive effects of educational efforts made by the White House since 1968. In addressing Congress on 3 March 1970, for example, Mr. Nixon acknowledged that "the tone of this message, and the approach of this Administration, is intended to be challenging."[22] Sounding a theme now heard from many parts of the educational and political spectra, he reminded his audience about the limitations of formal schooling and about our poor understanding of "the mystery of the learning process:"[25]

> We must stop imagining that the Federal government had a cohesive education policy during a period of explosive expansion--when our Federal education programs are largely fragmented and disjointed, and too often administered in a way that frustrates local and private efforts.
>
> We must stop letting wishes color our judgments about the educational effectiveness of many special compensatory programs, when--despite some dramatic and encouraging exceptions--there is growing evidence that most of them are not yet measurably improving the success of poor children in school.[25]

Yet, for all his candor in admitting the serious problems confronting the American educational system and the inability of available mechanisms to overcome these obstacles, Mr. Nixon seems to stress the fiscal and productive rather than the pedagogical and moral losses that have ensued.

Thus, later in the same message, this cost-accounting note is sounded more clearly when he says:

> ... in this field more importantly than in any other, I have called for fundamental studies that should lead to far-reaching reforms before going ahead with major new expenditures for "more of the same."
>
> To state dogmatically "Money is not the answer" is not the answer. Money will be needed, and this Administration is prepared to commit itself to substantial increases in Federal aid to education--to place this among the highest priorities in our budget--as we seek a better understanding of the basic truths of the learning process, as we gain a new confidence that our education dollars are being wisely invested to bring back their highest return in social benefits, and as we provide some assurance that those funds contribute toward fundamental reform of American education.
>
> As we get more education for the dollar, we will ask the Congress to supply many more dollars for education.
>
> In the meantime, we are committing effort and money toward finding out how to make our education dollars go further. 26

If any doubt remains that countinghouse calculations are his primary concern in this area, another presidential message on education delivered a few weeks later made explicit the connection between education and economics. After summarizing some of the problems associated with higher education, he asserted that:

> This system teaching seven million students now employs more than half a million instructors and professors and spends approximately $23 billion a year. In its most visible form, the end result of this system contributes strongly to the highest standard of living on earth, indeed the highest in history. One of the discoveries of economists in

> recent years, is the extraordinary, in truth the dominant, role which investment in human beings plays in economic growth. [27]

Then, almost as an afterthought, Mr. Nixon qualified his economic justification for educational expenditures. "But," he said, "the more profound influence of education has been in the shaping of the American democracy and the quality of life of the American people."[28]

Unfortunately, nowhere in his statements on education are we offered a more precise definition of "the learning process itself." We search in vain for a better understanding of the pedagogical implications of his assertion that "we commit ourselves to the realizable dream of raising the American standard of learning."[29] This obvious rhetorical appeal to a vision of our material prosperity, in conjunction with the discussion of the importance of education, resonates throughout the messages sent to Congress on this subject. Indeed, while there is an occasional reference to the "'immeasurables' of schooling...such as responsibility, wit and humanity," [30] the overwhelming impression remains that good education is inseparable from the promise of affluence:

> No element of our national life is more worthy of our attention, our support and our concern than higher education. For no element has greater impact on the careers, the personal growth and the happiness of so many of our citizens. And no element is of greater importance in providing the knowledge and leadership on which the vitality of our democracy and the strength of our economy depends. [31]

The tone of these passages is at once tough and realistic, yet also compassionate and optimistic. This indicates that the President's conservatism on many domestic issues has been tempered in this particular area, since he has clearly chosen to adopt the language of liberalism in his discussions of educational reform. The importance of this distinction must not be underestimated nor dismissed as merely a change in language intended to mask more devious motives. On the contrary, I think it reveals the essential continuity of our recent public discourse on educational porblems.

The best evidence for this belief is the fact that, despite more than a decade of assault upon what Colin Greer has called "the Great School Legend," Mr. Nixon persists in propagating the myth of the schools as the institutional distillation of our egalitarian national spirit, dedicated to extensive social mobility and widespread access to wealth.[32] For instance, he declares, without any trace of irony or doubt, that "our schools have served us nobly for centuries."[33] Although sounding remarkably like his predecessor, it is obvious that the President has learned from the disappointing performance of the large-scale compensatory education programs initiated during the Johnson administration, qualifying his enthusiasm by admitting that "for most of our citizens, the American educational system is among the most successful in the history of the world. But for a portion of our population, it has never delivered on its promises."[39] Still, there seems remarkably little indication

of a willingness to examine the entire educational enterprise in an equally unsentimental and hard-headed manner.

The refusal of the Nixon administration completely to abandon the reformist cause or to open a frontal assault on education itself cannot be attributed primarily to bureaucratic caution on the part of political functionaries. After all, available evidence does provide the data for a plausible explanation of recent educational experience that removes the burden of proof from both the partisans of American pedagogy and the defenders of past and future federal aid. Accepted in one form or another by almost all American educators, the outlines of this argument have emphasized two important factors that have contributed to our present difficulties.[35] On the one hand, we are reminded of the confused and contradictory thrusts of public policy while we are simultaneously cautioned about the uncertainty of our knowledge in measuring inputs and outputs of the educational process.[36] On the other hand, we are also told of the very real obstacles that prevented an adequate test either of national reforms or the educational institutions through which federal money was channeled. In addition to the complications involved in assessing the pedagogical impact of the funds from Washington, it now seems clear that the demands made on education greatly exceeded the expectations that should legitimately have been made of it. Assertions that education could bring about economic and social justice frequently had been made long before federal

intervention began, but the fact remains that when these far-reaching national reforms were introduced they never received more than 8% of the system's total expenditures. The fiscal difficulties were further compounded by the fact that just as the wave of reform was cresting, money for such domestic purposes was being siphoned off to shore up the Vietnam efforts.[37] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, bureaucracies on the local, state and federal levels were often politically unsympathetic to the reformist activities and thereby helped to undermine their effectiveness.[38]

The essential features of this analysis apparently reaffirmed the President's conviction that power must be decentralized and that his belief in revenue-sharing was as applicable to education as it was to other areas of domestic spending. Seen in this context, the decision to create the National Institute of Education (NIE) and the National Foundation for Higher Education (NFHE) represents not only a penchant for reducing and rationalizing the federal role in education, but also a desire to return the national government to a more passive stance vis-à-vis other units of authority in America. By emphasizing the value of research to meet the needs of localities, Mr. Nixon implicitly acknowledged the distortions induced by previous federal insistence upon the priority of its concerns above those of individual institutions and the educational community itself.[39] Moreover, this attempted circumscription of Washington's power highlights the brief interlude during

which the United States Office of Education (USOE), adopted a posture quite different from that to which it had been accustomed since it originated about a century before.

Admittedly, both before and after its creation as a department in 1867, there were certain forces inside USOE as well as in the nation at large which had hoped for a much larger federal influence on American education.[40] However, contemporary partisans of federal intervention have had to resort to imaginative reconstructions of our history in order to find precedents for such a policy. While some notable examples of federal involvement could be cited, particularly the Northwest Ordinance and the Morrill Act, the record of active educational efforts by Washington proved to be tortuous indeed, and no one could convincingly turn the exceptions into a rule. These abortive attempts to rewrite the American past so as to make it more congenial to current circumstances cannot obscure the fact that those who envisioned a powerful USOE as the national leader of education were singularly unsuccessful in generating enthusiasm for their position until the mid-twentieth century.[41] Nonetheless, the problems associated with enhancing the federal role in education indicate not only the strength of the opposition to such an aggrandizement of authority by the national government but also the persistently fragile nature of the support that did exist for education in general throughout most of our history.

If we have lately come to accept uncritically the

assumptions about the significance of education for our national development, even a tentative interpretation of the available data would suggest that in the nineteenth century conditions were far more fluid and unresolved than we have been led to believe. This formative period in our educational history, in sharp contrast to the present day in which a fascination with education is taken for granted, was a time in which institutionalized learning remained a marginal social activity occupying relatively little capital and involving small percentages of the population. The explanation for this is not hard to understand, however unfamiliar its premises are to our modern ears. When a sizeable segment of the population lived on the edge of poverty, even compulsory school laws of the most humane intentions could not compensate for the harsher realities of a struggle for existence whose outcome was often in doubt. Subsistence farmers and poorly-paid industrial workers simply could not afford the loss of wages they would have suffered had their children attended school.[42] Those businessmen who, on the contrary, had managed to accumulate substantial fortunes were often unlettered individuals whose commercial, pragmatic bent found little utility in formal education.[43] Consequently, a commitment to learning--and especially to higher education--was primarily identified with the cultural aspirations of local elites and religious groups. Still, these private and sectarian leadership elements of American society did not automatically welcome

governmental intrusion into education, because they generally did not believe in equality as much as in liberty, an ideological distinction which led them to fear the dangerously unpredictable sentiments of the democratic majority.[44] In such an historical context, where there was no obvious correspondence between social status, educational attainments, economic strength and political prestige, influence over the pedagogical process was jealously guarded by those who possessed it.

The case may therefore be made that the educational tradition of local control represented not a fundamental and widely-shared belief in the political virtues of decentralized authority, but instead was a consequence of the precarious nature of the complex process by which the instabilities of a social order in great flux could be overcome and the organization of the nation state proceed. The most important aspects of this development closely paralleled the maturation of a national economy in which linkages between regions were solidified and alliances formed between local elites which facilitated the submerging of provincial differences in the formation of a national culture.[45] For our purposes, it should also be noted that central to this integrative process was the growing allegiance between an older cultural elite of narrow social origin and groups of individuals of sometimes even greater, but usually newer, wealth. As a consequence of this union, new sources of funding were found for the expansion of existing

educational institutions which, because of the new funds, experienced dramatic changes in their form and function. Moreover, the entire structure of the educational system was altered in accordance with the new pressures generated by this growth because, during the very period in which the system was incorporating new population groups under its aegis, it simultaneously underwent an internal rationalization which made its various parts operate more efficiently within a meritocratic hierarchy.[46]

Most observers have focused on the social mobility provided by this transformed educational system based on merit rather than on inherited privilege. However, the true significance of its greater homogeneity may well be its contribution to the geographical mobility of the upper echelons of American society which was essential to the creation of a self-conscious community of national leaders who shared a set of basic values about the kind of society they wanted to live in.[47] Although it was certainly not the only, or even the most critical, component in the achievement of a greater national integration, we should not underestimate the importance of education in this development because of its concern with shaping attitudes, particularly in its elaboration of the tradition of public service.[48] Still, this makes it all the more difficult to account for the fact that the country's educational leadership consolidated its power much more slowly than did its counterparts in the realm of economics and politics.

Without exaggerating the extent to which the American economy had become internally rationalized by this time--for the process of maturation had not itself proceeded very far before the Depression and the New Deal brought about a more systematic entry of the state into industrial affairs--there can be little doubt that the education system did not slavishly imitate the experiences occurring elsewhere in the American society.[49] The leaders of American education who wanted to see an increased national interest in the pedagogical enterprise were limited in their ability to get the kind of concentration needed fully to dominate the social landscape of the entire United States by their fears of popular control of their institutions. The irony of this situation should not escape us. Revisionists have been helpful in identifying the degree to which the call for keeping politics out of education simply camouflaged the ways in which the socialization of children in institutions of learning was already molding attitudes and propagandizing for a distinct ideology that was most compatible with the beliefs of the American upper class.[51] It is nevertheless true, as others have argued, that education in this country kept government intervention on the state and national level to a minimum. The problem, of course, was that the containment of education within the confines of the laissez-faire marketplace meant that there was a limited consumer demand for the products offered by the American educational establishment, and professionals convinced of the

value of their top-of-the-line goods found it difficult to understand why academic scholarship in the sciences as well as the humanities continued to have relatively slight impact on the workings of American society.[52] But, caught in a dilemma of their own making, they searched in vain for some recourse which could safely enhance the prestige of education by introducing the centralized planning necessary successfully to control the anarchistic tendencies of a system that had grown so haphazardly. It was necessary to surrender some of their autonomy to the state if they were to demonstrate what education could do for the United States if given the opportunity, and the educational establishment resisted the pressures because of their residual fears about the penetration of political authority into what had been their private domain.[53]

Given the ambivalence of important groups of American educators, it should hardly be surprising that the operations of the United States Office of Education remained carefully circumscribed until well into the twentieth century. Restricted for most of its history to gathering statistics about education across the nation, USOE was only recently entrusted with power adequate to the major role its supporters had long desired. It was not, for example, until the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 that USOE assumed the reformers' mantle and abandoned its scholarly repose in response to the shock of Sputnik. Our truncated historical sensibilities make it easy for us to

forget that this represented an unprecedented intervention by the United States government in American education, an intervention whose wisdom and effectiveness is now being re-examined.[59] The swell of protests which accompanied this dramatic shift came from those who saw it as a national pre-emption of states' rights, but the extraordinary circumstances created by the Soviet technological challenge to American superiority had erased any lingering doubts of those in the forefront of The Academic Revolution, and thus managed successfully to precipitate a serious federal presence in the educational system.[55]

Although support for federal input had been steadily growing throughout this century, reaching a crescendo after the turmoil of the Depression convinced skeptics that the social order itself was in imminent peril from the system's loss of legitimacy in the eyes of many Americans, the Soviet achievement in space provided a convenient opportunity to construct a conduit for funds from Washington. Nonetheless, it can be argued convincingly that the subsequent history of USOE recapitulates the ambiguity of their earlier attitudes and paradoxically has confirmed both their greatest hopes for and worst fears about an enlarged federal role in the educational system. Indeed, the entire post-1958 episode is best characterized by a series of dichotomies.

In the first place, there are two major periods in the activist phase of USOE history. The initial one begins with the passage of NDEA and can be said to conclude some six

years later with another group of amendments added to the original legislation in 1964. Primarily addressed to the immediate threat of Soviet advances in science, these years emphasized the relationship between education and foreign policy. Designed to produce quick advancements in fields related to defense needs, federal funds were intended to strengthen existing elite universities which had the capability to meet this challenge. Quite obviously, this meant that most of the money was channeled into the most prestigious institutions of higher education, and thereby assumed that the system should be reformed from the top down.[56] The second phase, which was initiated in 1965 by the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was almost the exact opposite of the one that preceded it. The continuing civil rights struggles and the sudden explosions of violence in our urban ghettos were the formative contexts for this legislation, which was intended to deal exclusively with domestic needs, and which therefore focused upon the difficulties in American schools rather than on the development of higher education. In many ways even more controversial than the precedent-setting NDEA, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was embroiled from the outset in bitter debates about the relationship between national reforms and local control of education. Directly involved in the sensitive areas of race and class, ESEA worked through the weakest local and state education agencies, where poor student performance seemed to be

related to the low socio-economic standing of their populations. Thus, it did not have the support of powerful institutions with a national orientation, but had to rely instead on the beneficence of those who recognized the need for such compensatory programs.[57]

Needless to say, these additional burdens meant that problems which had been implicit in the earlier effort became manifest here. For instance, the entire post-Sputnik era never dealt successfully with the question of how federal funds should be distributed. Contradictory pressures were always at work in this area, for those who felt that federal resources should be concentrated to ensure maximum impact were opposed by others who insisted that funds from the national teeasury should be spread equitably throughout the society. Supporters of the former position were generally found in the leadership of the federal education bureaucracy and in America's foremost educational institutions, and they argued in favor of broad discretionary authority for the federal bureaucracy so that these civil servants could make the determination about program development and the allocation of funds. However, to avoid the appearance of political intrigue and in order to solidify their contacts with sympathetic reformers in the field, they also advocated the use of outside professionals as consultants to evaluate proposals for federal grants.[58] On the other hand, since these panels were composed of individuals with established reputations, there was inevitably a certain personal and professional bias in their deliberations which

helps to account for the highly-skewed pattern of grant distribution. Opponents of this meritocratic position, including political figures in the Congress and spokespersons for the various professional educational organizations, often felt that such procedures did not faithfully represent the interests of their constituents, and, to prevent such discrimination, they demanded greater equity in the dispersal of federal funds.[59]

The persistent and unresolved nature of this controversy provides an additional clue to the underlying ideological unity of federal intervention which is seldom perceived because of the lack of programmatic coherence that obscures the basic pattern of these reforms. Again, the dynamics of the situation are most readily understood as a function of the political economy of capitalism Just as the dislocations of the 1930's provided the incentive for a systematic assertion of government power in economic activities, so too did the intense ideological struggles of the 1940's provide the incentives and assumptions for the federal efforts in educational reform. It is to this period that we must turn if we are to understand the origins of the pressures for federal reform that successfully culminated in the passage of NDEA in the following decade.

More than anything else, it was the traumatic experience of total mobilization during the second world war that served to generate renewed enthusiasm among educational leaders for federal intervention. The mass testing of

soldiers entering the United States armed forces had underscored the need for greater uniformity in the educational system, because it revealed an enormous variation in performance among the recruits. Yet these disparities were not entirely unanticipated by seasoned observers of the American scene, and to a significant degree, it was the successes rather than the failures of the educational system which were most influential in altering prevailing attitudes towards the value of the federal government's presence in this area.[60] Many thoughtful citizens were convinced that the war had demonstrated that Washington and the universities could mutually benefit from their cooperation on valuable research in both technological and psycholgical fields. The contributions made by personnel trained in academic institutions as well as by the universities themselves seemed substantial proof to any impartial witness that education could be of tremendous use to the nation, and was therefore worthy of receiving public funds for its operation. This reconciliation between the forces of power and the defenders of knowledge was further facilitated by the importance both groups attached to the nation's industrial strength as a critical factor in the allied victory. Accepting the paramount role played by economic might in providing for the national defense, they could acknowledge a mutual interest in assuring continued growth through the application of centralized planning and new management techniques learned in the war effort.[61]

When returning veterans in unexpectedly large numbers took advantage of the educational benefits offered by the G.I. Bill of Rights, this seemed to substantiate the most optimistic predictions about the possibilities for education assuming a major role in the post-war reconstruction of American society. Unfortunately, the almost universal approval given to this legislation was never again accorded any other educational measure passed by the federal government. The G.I. Bill put money directly in the hands of the individual veteran who then had a great deal of personal freedom in choosing a suitable educational program tailored to his needs, and thus was able to satisfy a very diverse clientele by simultaneously offering meaningful options to the ex-soldier while not demanding the nation's colleges and universities to make any fundamental changes in their structure in order to accomodate this new group of students.[62]

Given the G.I. Bill's generally positive reception by most segments of the American population, it is all the more surprisingly that later pieces of legislation did not attempt to duplicate its essentially laissez-faire format. To understand the reason for this strange development, it is necessary to remember the sudden shift in public sentiment as euphoria over defeat of the Axis powers was replaced by the grim realities of the Cold War. Looking forward to the resumption of peace, it seemed adequate to create opportunities which maximized the alternatives for individual

decisions about careers and life styles. However, the onset of a dangerous new ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union demanded a far more assertive approach to educational reform and social change than had been practiced through such indirect mechanisms as the G.I. Bill.[63]

In 1948, two major works of American educational history appeared to signal the final rejection by liberal social planners of their laissez-faire heritage. The work by President Truman's Commission on Higher Education, entitled Higher Education for American Democracy, and James Bryant Conant's Education in a Divided World are remarkable studies because, unlike almost all recent treatment of the subject, they devote extensive sections to an ideological justification for the educational proposals they offer.[64] Reading these works today is somewhat misleading for their assumptions about the function of educational reform being the assurance of social tranquility, economic growth, technological sophistication and political stability have now become a familiar litany recited by almost all educational commentators. Nevertheless, at the time of their appearance, both works were met with great suspicion by many of their more conservative colleagues who thought them overly simplistic and unduly manipulative. If in the intervening years since their original publication the vision they projected has captured (at least until quite recently) virtually all contemporary discussions on the subject of educational reform, they did not initially capture the

imagination of the educational community.[65]

Of most interest in both these works is their curious and contradictory attitude towards the role of the state--an attitude which by now should be familiar to us. Essentially, they believe that the state's primary function is to ensure "equality of educational opportunity," a key phrase which has since come to characterize the position of those who believe in the philosophical and political virtue of competition. As the authors of both works readily admit, equality of educational opportunity has been more of an ideal than a reality in our national life, but, faced with the ideological threat of an aggressive communist nation, they believe that we must make every effort to prove to other countries that American society deserves to be a model for their own development.

Although they intend the phrase to apply to distinctions based on wealth, race, sex and geographical origin, their vision of equal opportunity is not necessarily as benign as it seems on the surface. Counterposing it to communism's stress on equality of distribution, these ideologues emphasize the dgreee to which the United States has been built on the theory of equality of access. On the other hand, whether or not we choose to accept the identification they make between this philosophical tradition and the destiny of American society, there is little doubt that this has been a powerful mechanism for legitimizing the inequality of resource distribution and for increasing the productivity of labor. By fulfilling the historically-

liberating mission of bourgeois societies, the mythology of equal opportunity has served to free enormous productive human energies that successfully have brought this nation to spectacular levels of affluence and power. Yet there is a nagging sense in reading these works, especially in many parts of Conant's arguments, that equality of opportunity is less important because it allows for some degree of mobility than because it provides a convenient defense for the persistent inequalities of a capitalist economy. If he insists on equating opportunity with the glories of democracy, it is to his pecular definition of a classless society that Conant is really referring. He takes it for granted, in this regard, that Americans are as unanimously in favor of "the continuation of our highly competitive economic system with its wide divergence of pecuniary rewards" as they are committed to the belief in "the continuation of a form of government based on free elections and free expression of opinion."[66] In his divided world, of course, education in America is constantly contrasted to the Soviet system, but it is not difficult to see that its function seems to be to obscure rather than illuminate the nature of power in the American landscape, so that citizens can become more dedicated to the eradication of these foreign and subversive doctrines than they are to the fight for social justice at home.

So persuasive was this vision, so threatening the spectre of the Soviet challenge, that the liberal ideal of equal educational opportunity, despite its confusions,

succeeded in cornering the USOE educational reform market in the 1960's. And yet, while the partisans of equal educational opportunity rhetorically insist that the needs of individual citizens are identical to the requirements of the national economy, the experience of the last ten years contradicts this claim. Thus, it is encouraging to read an educational message from President Kennedy to the 88th Congress in which he reminds his listeners that "Fundamentally, education is and must always be a local responsibility, for it thrives best when nurtured at the grassroots of our democracy," but then saddening when we further read that he adds, without any note of embarrassment, that "in our present era of economic expansion, population growth, and technological advance, state, local, and private efforts are insufficient. These efforts must be reinforced by national support if American education is to yield a maximum of individual development and national well-being."[67] One is left to wonder how any individual can be expected to exert control over such large-scale economic and social processes.

Unfortunately, liberals have been largely successful in accomplishing their goal of equalizing educational opportunity through the use of federal powers, but it is now quite clear that this achievement has in no way brought about the expected increase in domestic tranquility. Indeed, the rleationship between them seems to be the reverse of those great expectations. Education, by

being linked to the economy while lacking commensurate power to shape industrial activities, is not capable of fulfilling its goals for changing the society. More tragic still, by focusing on the external needs of the social order, it has ignored at great cost its own province of the mind.

Educators, who really should be dedicated to the cultivation of the intellect, have managed both to demean the activity that characterizes explicitly economic endeavors and also to debase pedagogy itself, which has gotten lost in the scramble for power and prestige in the marketplace, Perhaps now we can become a bit more humble; we can attend to those matters which we are better-equipped to handle. Who knows, we may yet convince others, and perhaps even ourselves, by the strength of our moral persuasion and intellectual integrity, that education need not be a substitute for anything, that it is truly priceless in itself.

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FOOTNOTES

1 See Christopher Lasch, "The Revival of Political Controversy," The Agony of the American Left (New York, 1968). Also see Theodore Roszak, Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society (Garden City, N.Y., 1973).

2 See, for example, the essays in Barton J. Bernstein, ed., Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History (New York, 1968) and Theodore Roszak, ed., The Dissenting Academy (New York, 1968).

3 Among other works, I have found the following most helpful: Robin Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science (New York, 1973), Stephan Thernstrom, Poverty and Progress (Boston, 1964), Gabriel Kolko, The Politics of War (New York, 1968) and The Triumph of Conservatism (Chicago, 1967), Thomas J. McCormick, China Market (Chicago, 1967), Gar Alperovitz, Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam (New York, 1967), Walter LaFeber, The New Empire (Ithace, 1967), William Appleman Williams Roots of the Modern American Empire (New York, 1969) and James Weinstein, The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State 1900-1918 (Boston, 1968).

4 In this area, see Michael Katz, The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts (Boston, 1970) and Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools (New York, 1971); Joel H. Spring, Education and the Rise of the Corporate State (Boston, 1972); Colin Greer, The Great School Legend: A Revisionist Interpretation of Public Education (New York, 1972); Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society (New York, 1970) and Celebration of Awareness (Garden City, N.Y., 1971); Edward A. Krug, The Shaping of the American High School (Madison, Wis., 1972); Allen Graubard, Free the Children: Radical Reform and the Free School Movement (New York, 1974) and Sol Cohen, Progressives and Urban School Reform (New York, 1964).

5 See for instance the essays in Christopher Lasch's The World of Nations: Reflections on American History, Politics and Culture (New York, 1973) and Herbert Gintis's essays in Alan Gartner, Colin Greer and Frank Riessman, eds., After Deschooling, What?: Ivan Illich et al. (New York, 1973) and Walter Laqueur and George L. Mosse, eds., Journal

of Contemporary History, Volume VI: Education and Social Structure in the Twentieth Century (New York, 1967).

6 In many ways, this re-examination was initiated by Bernard Bailyn's brilliant essay, Education in the Forming of American Society (New York, 1960).

7 Carl Oglesby, Trapped in a System (Washington, 1965). Carl Davidson, The New Radicals in the Multiversity, n.p., March, 1968. In addition, see the publications in the SDS series, Radical Education Project. See also essays in Radical America and Studies on the Left, and in the English journal New Left Review.

8 On the economic importance of education, see Fritz Machlup, The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States (Princeton, 1962). Also see the essays in Education : Structure and Society, B.R. Cosin, ed., (Baltimore, 1972).

9 Spring is most explicit on this relationship. On the general workings of the marketplace, see Editors of Ramparts with Frank Browning, In the Marketplace: Consumerism in America (San Francisco, 1972).

10 See Arthur Pearl, "The Case for Schooling America," Gartner et al., eds., pp. 112-117.

11 See Michael Katz's review of Clarence J. Karier, Paul Violas and Joel Spring, Roots of Crisis: American Education in the Twentieth Century in the Harvard Education Review, XLIII, 3 (August, 1973), 435-442 and "What the Schools Cannot Do," Time, April 16, 1973, 78-85.

12 Such an analysis is made by William Appleman Williams in The Great Evasion (Chicago, 1964), by Herbert Marcuse in One-Dimensional Man (Boston, 1964) and by Marcus G. Raskin, Being and Doing: An Inquiry into the Colonization, Decolonization and Reconstruction of American Society and its State (New York, 1971).

I would argue that Katz, in Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools, exaggerates the early resolution of the conflict over structure and function in the schools. On this point, see Spring, pp. 143-147.

13 Raymond E. Callahan, Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces that Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools (Chicago, 1962).

14 tr. Gilbert Highet from the second German edition, (New York, 1939), p. xiii.

15 Judson Jerome, "After Illich, What?", Gartner et al.,

eds., p. 105.

16 See David Riesman, "Education at Harvard," Change, V, 7 (September, 1973), 24-37, for a discussion of meritocracy and Harvard.

17 See the National Trades' Union statement "Resolutions on the Social, Civil, and Intellectual Condition of the Laboring Classes," from The Man, New York, August 30, 1918, II, 357, quoted in Edwin Rozwenc, Ideology and Power in the Age of Jackson (New York, 1964), pp. 122-127.

18 This argument is made most forcefully by Cohen and Spring.

19 See Oscar Handlin and Mary Handlin, Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of Government in the American Economy; Massachusetts 1779-1861 (New York, 1947). For a more radical analysis, see Weinstein, Corporate Ideal.

20 Compare the views of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston , 1945) and Gabriel Kolko, Triumph of Conservatism.

21 See Herbert Marcuse, "Watergate: When Law and Morality Stand in the Way," New York Times, June 27, 1973. It is important in this context to see the distinction between elites and classes. See E. Digby Baltzell, An American Business Aristocracy (New York, 1962), which is most helpful on this point. It is also helpful to see the identity of political and economic elites, as Kolko has done in his essay, "The Men of Power," The Roots of American Foreign Policy (Boston, 1969).

22 For a discussion on the federal role in education, see Homer D. Babbidge and Robert M. Rosenzweig, The Federal Interest in Higher Education (New York, 1962).

23 Presidential speeches and messages are quoted from the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents for the dates indicated. May 3, 1970, 313.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 May 3, 1970, 313-314.

27 March 19, 1970, 382, emphasis in original. See also March 3, 1970, 314.

28 March 19 1970, 382.

29 Radio address, October 25, 1972, 1564 and March 3, 1970,

314.

30 March 3, 1970, 306.

31 March 19, 1970, 383.

32 Greer.

33 March 3, 1970, 305.

34 March 3, 1970, 313.

35 See Katz's review of Roots of Crisis and the Time article, "What the Schools Cannot Do" (see note 11).

36 These problems are discussed in the introduction to Frederick Mosteller and Daniel P. Moynihan, eds., On Equality of Educational Opportunity: Papers Deriving from the Harvard University Faculty Seminar on the Coleman Report (New York, 1972).

37 This argument is made most forcefully in Christopher Jencks, et al., Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America (New York, 1972). See John F. Hughes and Anne O. Hughes, Equal Education (Bloomington, Ind., 1972), pp. 14 ff. Also see Nixon message of March 3, 1970, p. 311.

38 Local bureaus are discussed in Hughes and Hughes, pp. 81-108. State problems are discussed on pp. 58-80. See also Jerome T. Murphy, "Title III of ESEA: The Impact of Discretionary Funds on State Education Bureaucracies," Harvard Education Review, XLIII, 3 (August, 1973), 362-385. President Nixon has placed undue emphasis on the problems of the federal bureaucracy when these studies make it clear that there were similar problems on the state and local levels. Unease about the enormous staff growth of the federal bureaucracy during the 1960's was a major source of concern for USOE officials. There were important plans made for re-organization of the federal bureaucracy, particularly following the passage of NDEA and ESEA. See a discussion of the USOE reorganization after the passage of ESEA, Hughes and Hughes, pp. 35-37. Also see, United States Office of Education, Commission on Mission and Organization of the United States Office of Education, A Federal Education Agency for the Future.

39 For an example of how some of Mr. Nixon's proposals have functioned in practice, see Chester E. Finn, Jr., "The National Foundation for Higher Education: Death of an Idea," Change, IV, 2 (March, 1972), 22-31.

40 For a history of the Office, see Harry Kursh, The United States Office of Education (Philadelphia, 1965).

41 For example, see the discussion in Babbidge and Rosenzweig, pp. 1-21.

42 It is now clear that a certain level of economic maturity is necessary for the development of a sophisticated educational system. See the discussion in Harold L. Hodgkinson, Education in Social and Cultural Perspectives (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962). On working class education, see Thernstrom, Poverty, pp. 2 ff.

43 This argument is made most convincingly by Richard Hofstadter in Anti-Intellectualism in American Life, (New York, 1966).

44 This distinction is discussed in the introduction to Mosteller and Moynihan. Also see G. William Domhoff, The Higher Circles: The Governing Class in America (New York, 1971), pp. 256-261, 265-273 and Baltzell, Business Aristocracy, pp. 327-372.

45 These economic developments in the United States are discussed in Douglass C. North, The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860 (New York, 1966) and in Barrington Moore, Jr., The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Boston, 1966), which has been most helpful in analyzing the relationship between economic and political development.

46 On the development of the American university, see laurence R. Veysey, The Emergence of the American University (Chicago, 1965). Thorstein Veblen's classic study, The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men (New York, 1957), remains a valuable contribution to our understanding of this development.

47 On this point, see the following: Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, The Academic Revolution (Garden City, N.Y., 1969), esp. pp. 1-27; C. Wright Mills, Sociology and Pragmatism (New York, 1964), esp. pp. 1-122 and Stanislaw Ossowski, Class Structure in the Social Consciousness (New York, 1963).

48 One of the most important theorists in this area as Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard between 1869 and 1909. For an elaboration of his ideas, see "Five American Contributions to Civilization" and "Equality in a Republic" in American Contributions to Civilization and Other Essays and Addresses (New York, 1907).

49 This development is treated in Jencks and Riesman. Their study reminds us of how recently this process has takne place.

50 Although Jencks and Riesman have emphasized the

seemingly inevitable nature of this process, their own work shows many of the tensions that remain unresolved because of the minimal role of the state.

51 See Cohen, pp. 213-227.

52 Without minimizing the element of compulsion which the state enforced, the complexity of this relationship can be seen from Charles William Eliot's essay, "The Exemption from Taxation," American Contributions. Also see the importance of the marketplace in the thinking of James B. Conant in The Education of American Teachers, esp. pp. 112-145.

Theodore Roszak has emphasized the homogeneity of American scholars in Wasteland, pp. 164-252.

53 James D. Koerner, The Mis-education of American Teachers (Boston, 1963) and Conant, Education of have a common definition of the education establishment, which identifies it with professional organizations. This definition is, however, too diffuse, because it neglects other factors in the establishment of academic standards. See Nathan Glazer, "Are Academic Standards Obsolete?", Editors of Change, Inside Academe: Culture in Crisis (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1972).

54 For an example of how important an issue federal intervention was before 1958, see the remarks by Henry Steele Commager in The Commonwealth of Learning (New York, 1958), p. 25, footnote.

55 See the testimony in Congressional hearings on NDEA for a sampling of opinion. Most professionals in education were in favor of the legislation while most business groups were opposed to it. This split remained constant in later hearings on amending NDEA.

56 In the original legislation money was allocated in accordance with the numbers of students attending institutions of higher education in the state, which meant that it reflected and reinforced the existing distribution of educational resources. Hughes and Hughes remains the best discussion of any title of the ESEA legislation and is expecially helpful because Title I was the most controversial section.

57 See Hughes and Hughes. Murphy, "Title III," contains the best discussion on important titles of ESEA.

58 To understand the use of discretionary funds, compare the formula grants provided in Title I of ESEA and the language used in regard to the Commissioner and Consultants in the Education Professions Development Act of 1967.

59 On the distribution of grants, see Francis Keppel, The Necessary Revolution in American Education (New York, 1966) and Clark Kerr, The Uses of the University (New York, 1966), pp. 119 ff. and 48-57, respectively.

I do not mean to imply that proponents of this view necessarily possessed any greater political or moral virtues. Indeed, it often seemed that they did not want justice for all parties as much as they wanted to be given a fair share of the action. President Nixon recognized this problem--see his March 19, 1970 address, esp., p. 387.

60 Similar experiences in World War I had furthered the growth of the testing movement led by Edward Thorndike. See Clarence J. Karier, "Elite Views on American Education," Laqueur and Mosse, Education and Social Structure, pp. 149-163.

61 Evidence of this merger is provided by the career of Robert McNamara. After working in the Pentagon, the "Whiz Kids" virtually rebuilt the Ford Motor company before going on to Harvard. McNamara finally found his way back to the Defense Department, where his style of management could not prevent the Vietnam fiasco.

62 A new and penetrating study of this important piece of educational legislation has recently appeared. See Keith W. Olson, The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges (Lexington, Ky., 1974). Olson is especially convincing in his elucidation of the conservative social thinking of the bill's supporters.

63 There were many examinations of the Cold War's impact on American intellectual life. Two of the best are Noam Chomsky, "Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship," American Power and the New Mandarins (New York, 1969) and Christopher Lasch, "The Cultural Cold War," Agony of the American Left.

64 President's Commission on Higher Education, Education for American Democracy (New York, 1947) and Conant, Education in a Divided World: The Function of the Public Schools in our Unique Society (Cambridge, Mass., 1948).

65 Responses to the Truman Report are collected in the pamphlet edited by Gail Kennedy, Education for Democracy: The Debate over the Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education (Boston, 1952).

66 Conant, pp. 5-6. Eliot makes a startingly similar argument in "The Function of Education in a Democratic Society" in William A. Nielson, ed., Charles W. Eliot: The Man and His Beliefs.

67 Quoted in Keppel, p. 179.